



THE CIRCLE W FARM
THE WALTER WHITE ESTATE - (NOW HAWKEN SCHOOL)

Born September 8, 1876, in Cleveland, Ohio,^{1.} Walter Charles White^{2.} was the son of Thomas White, president of the White Sewing Machine Company. As the early auto industry took hold, Walter and his brothers, Windsor and Rollin, became developers of the steam motor truck and, as their business grew, they separated from the sewing machine company to form the White Motor Company. Their early success with the White Steamer brought many firsts in the auto industry.

The White auto became one of the outstanding racing cars of its day. Walter White undertook racing as a promotional stunt to sell White automobiles. His most famous racer was "Whistling Billy," so-called because of the noise it made getting up steam.^{3.}

During World War I Walter White was made civilian head of transportation for the American Expeditionary Forces and went to France. Subsequently, the White Motor Company supplied the Allied Forces with 18,000 ambulances and trucks for the war effort. The French government honored Walter White by making him a member of the Legion of Honor.

Among his many service awards, Mr. White was made an Honorary Colonel in the Toronto Scottish Regiment by the Canadian Government. An officer of this rank was assigned a piper for life by the Regiment. In return, the officer supplied the piper with his pipes, his kilt uniform, and paid his transportation when his piping services were requested by the family. Pipe Sergeant Major Thompson became the White family piper. Strangely enough, his first duty was to pipe Walter White's funeral procession from St. Christopher's Church in Gates Mills to the cemetery.^{4.} Walter White's untimely death came at the age of 53 on September 29, 1929, as the result of an auto accident.^{5.}

Walter White was drawn to the Gates Mills area by his love of horses and hunting. He decided to invest in some property and develop a gentleman's farm for himself and two bachelor friends, Al Bailey and Charley Clark.^{6.} According to the Geauga County Deeds, Volume 143, p. 611, he began purchasing property in Chester Township no later than June 1916. The estate eventually included 1,400 acres of land bounded on the west by County Line Road, the north by Wilson Mills Road, the east by Caves Road, and the south by Old Mill Road.

The estate was named "The Circle W Farm" which came from the W's in Walter White, Mr. Warner, the farm manager, and the architectural firm of Walker and Weeks who designed the estate.⁷ Mr. George Brown of Gates Mills, who was a master mason, worked for Mr. White between October 1916 and August 1923 and designed the stone work included in the retaining walls, bridge, garden area, vestibule, and pumphouse.⁸

The buildings on the estate were located at the northeast corner of County Line Road and today's Mayfield Road. At the time Mr. White began purchasing property Mayfield Road ran through the Village of Gates Mills. As traffic increased in the Village and accidents became more frequent, the state decided to relocate Mayfield Road from a point beginning at the entrance to the Circle W Farm, then crossing the White property to the river and joining Mayfield Road on high land one mile west of Gates Mills.⁹ New Mayfield Road was completed in 1941.¹⁰ (The original driveway to the White home was located at the north side of Mayfield opposite Westchester Trail.)

While on a trip to South Carolina in the winter of 1917, Walter White met Mary Virginia Saunders. They were married on September 25, 1919, and moved to Cleveland.

Mr. White was interested in horses for equestrian competition and hunting, but held a special interest in polo ponies and the game of polo. In order to provide shelter for the horses, the stables were completed as soon as possible. However, shortly after Mr. & Mrs. White were married, these wooden stables caught fire. Rebuilding the stables was a priority. The first floor of the second structure was constructed with cement blocks.

The stables were home to over 100 polo ponies and hunters as well as all the men (stablemen, head groom, and full-time trainer) needed to care for them. The second floor of the stables contained rooms for the stable hands.

The Circle W polo field was a masterpiece. Tiles were laid under the field to ensure proper drainage. It was then sodded for three consecutive years before it was used. When polo fields were wet in the Gates Mills area, players could go to the White Estate and find a perfect playing area.

Because it was one of the prime playing spots, it was not uncommon to find a large number of horses, players, and grooms descending on the Circle W. At that time it was usual to have one groom for every four horses. Besides local players, international polo teams traveled to the Chagrin Valley for competitions and many of the participants were housed at the estate.

In order to provide quarters for visiting polo players,¹¹ the second floor of the trophy room had bedrooms and shower facilities available as well as a kitchen and dining area downstairs. The building which housed the visitors became known as the 'trophy room' because of a collection of animal heads. Many of the trophies were bagged by Mr. Windsor White on a hunting trip to Africa, but the collection also included trophies of Rocky Mountain goats which were shot by Walter White on trips to the western part of the United States.¹² The trophy room was also the site of Sunday night potluck suppers with neighboring families, employee Christmas parties, and parties for the White children.¹³

Polo games were held almost every Sunday as well as other scheduled times. To keep in shape Mr. White spent some time each morning with his stick and ball practicing on the lawn between the house and the stables before we went to the office. (By the time of his death he was president of the White Motor Company.)

Originally, the area in front of the stables was gravel and contained mounting blocks to assist riders to their horses.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the stables burned again in 1959.¹⁵

When the stables were rebuilt the first time, Mr. & Mrs. White moved into the groom's cottage and lived there until the main house was ready for occupancy in 1923.¹⁶ The couple had seven children, but only five lived to adulthood: Ann, Mary, Walter, Martha, and Catherine.¹⁷ Twins born in September 1923¹⁸ died in June 1924 from whooping cough.¹⁹

Members of the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club, headquartered at the Maple Leaf Inn in Gates Mills (later the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club), began the sport of drag hunting and fox hunting in the early 1900's using the Chagrin Valley area as their hunting grounds.²⁰ In 1919 the Whites began the tradition of hosting an Egg Nog Party following the annual Thanksgiving Day Drag Hunt.²¹

Every spring the White family spent March and April at Mrs. White's home in South Carolina. Not only was the baggage packed off to the south, but many ponies and riding horses were shipped by train, and later by truck, for the enjoyment of the family members during their visit.²² Even the youngest child had riding arrangements. All the children started riding in basket saddles.²³

Next to the stables the most important building on the Circle W was the dairy barn which was built about 1918 at a cost of 1.25 million dollars.²⁴ It was designed by Fritz Walker and was regarded as being the largest standing single barn and largest non-commercial dairy barn in the State of Ohio at that²⁵

time. Measuring 400 feet by 150 feet, the three-story structure included running water in each stall and one of the first electric automatic milking machine systems.²⁷ The farm featured the best Holstein and Guernsey cows holding the highest milk producing records. Only the most qualified men were hired to tend the animals. The White children were taken often to the barn to enjoy a drink of fresh warm milk from their silver mugs.²⁸

The barn was so immense that a truck pulling a hay wagon could drive in the barn, turn completely around, and drive back out again.²⁹ The hay mow was under a 60 foot vaulted ceiling where a rope was tied so the children and their friends could swing back and forth and land in a big pile of hay.³⁰

Workmen hired to finish the inside of the barn recall brushing up to eight coats of enamel on the interior surfaces.³¹

The dairy barn, as well as the White house, was entered on the National Historic Register in 1976. Unfortunately, the barn burned down on April 13, 1977.³²

The farm included sheep, pigs, poultry, and four teams of Clydesdale draft horses used to work in the fields. Besides polo ponies and hunters, Mr. White became interested in purchasing and breeding thoroughbred horses.³³³⁴³⁵

The Circle W not only grew crops such as corn to use for ensilage for the cattle, but had extensive orchards where apples, pears, plums, and three different kinds of grapes were grown.

The Circle W employed many people year-round including a farm superintendent, teamster, truck drivers, blacksmith, carpenter, poultryman, four gardeners, two chauffeurs and a household staff of ten people. The estate also had several cottages where married full-time employees lived. The unmarried barn employees lived in a huge boarding house just north of the barn and the blacksmith shop had an apartment on the second floor. Seasonal workers were hired to supplement the full-time help. Up to 1925 the employees who did not live on the estate had transportation right to the farm by means of the electric interurban.³⁶

Milk, eggs, poultry, and produce were shipped from the farm into Cleveland on the electric interurban which ran through Chester Township between 1900 and 1925.³⁷ The Cleveland and Eastern Interurban Railway traveled from Cleveland to Gates Mills, through the White property at the north edge of today's driveway into Hawken School, merging with the drive several feet before it turns right to the school buildings or left to the playing fields. It then continued east to Caves Road just north of Mayfield and on through

Geauga County. (See Chapter 16 on the interurban) The White Estate was designated as Stop 22A.³⁸ Since there was a milkstand at the carpenter/blacksmith shop on the corner where the drive turns south to go to the school area, that could have been the pickup point.³⁹ After the interurban went out of business March 31, 1925, Mr. White bought the right-of-way for a riding path into Gates Mills. When Mayfield Road was relocated, a tunnel was built under the new highway so horses could still use it. The measurements for the tunnel were determined by gauging the size of the estate's master horsehandler, Lou Collister, on horseback, with another horse next to him.⁴⁰

Mr. White acquired the property at the northwest corner of Caves and Mayfield after Scotland School was closed in June 1926. Garage doors were placed in the southeast side of the school and the building was used to store equipment.⁴¹

One of the employees on the White estate was the head gardener, a Scotsman named Middleton who came from Gordon Castle, Scotland, to the United States in 1925 and worked at the Circle W until after Mrs. White died in 1959.⁴² He managed three greenhouses located south of the house and tended the vegetable gardens. Among other things he grew Jerusalem artichokes which were made into pickles,⁴³ a southern delicacy, and served at formal dinners. The greenhouses flourished under his care and provided fresh flowers for the house which were arranged twice a week by Mrs. White.⁴⁴ He provided especially beautiful arrangements of chrysanthemums for the west porch.⁴⁵

Mr. Karl Eichhorn, who had a degree in Animal Husbandry from Ohio State University, was hired before 1923 as the poultry manager. Although Mr. Eichhorn married in 1923 and lived elsewhere for some years, he returned and worked at the same job from 1932-38 when Mrs. White decided to discontinue the poultry business. At this time, being a married man with children, he lived in one of the cottages on the estate as did some of the other family men who worked full-time such as Arleigh Hendrick, the farm superintendent at that time, Frank Schoen, the chauffeur, Mr. Gunn, the night watchman, and the gardener. (Mr. Gunn had to sleep during the day so all the children were told to be quiet around his cottage).

At that time Mr. Eichhorn's wages were about \$100 a month, but he got free housing and received fruits, vegetables, eggs, poultry, etc., from the farm for his family's use.

Mr. Eichhorn managed the Circle W hatchery and did custom pheasant

hatching as well as providing a comfortable laying shed for his hens. Capons were also an important item at that time. Poultry and eggs were produced for market, much of it going to the Gates Mills area.

The families who lived at the Circle W were a close-knit group. One of the favorite activities during the year was the April Fool's Day picnic. Everyone came to see who would get the rubber hot dog, rubber swiss cheese, and the rubber doughnuts which had real powdered sugar on top.^{46.}

At Christmastime Mrs. White gave each of the employees a gift, usually for the children in the family.^{47.} Every Sunday she sent the chauffeur, who was dressed in a uniform and leather cap, to each cottage on the farm where there were children, and they all climbed in the big limo and rode off to St. Christopher's Church in Gates Mills.^{48.}

Construction of the house began in 1917 but was not finished until 1923.^{49.} The 23 room,^{50.} Georgian Revival,^{51.} three floor structure was built at a cost of over one million dollars.^{52.} Workers who handled the painting recalled painting one day and sanding the same area for six days. A total of seven coats of paint was brushed on and sanded to a velvety smoothness.^{53.} The result of all this work was that the house had a beautiful interior which didn't have to be touched for many years.

There was a sunken garden at the west end of the house and beyond that was a lily pond, tennis courts, a covered area where spectators could sit and watch tennis games, and a log cabin playhouse for the children.

Originally the house had a beautiful fountain on the first floor porch.^{54.} After Mr. White's death, Mrs. White installed stone steps at the north end of the porch which led down to the basement where the laundry room and Indian room were located.^{55.} The Indian room contained a collection of cigar store Indians.

Next to the porch was the living room which was lined in curly maple, much of which was taken from the Circle W itself. The doors are solid mahogany.^{56.} All the wood was pegged together; no nails were used. A fireplace was built in the west wall.

East of the living room is the foyer. A winding staircase leads to the second floor. The unique feature of the foyer is the wallpaper going up the staircase. The mural was almost completed by the time Mr. & Mrs. White were married. Mrs. White asked to have her home in South Carolina portrayed in the space which was still unpainted. So in the scene, the

the house is real, the rest of the scenery is fictional.

Next to the foyer was the formal dining room which could seat 18 comfortably. This room also has a fireplace which is located in the east wall.

The last room was originally a porch with a small breakfast room on one end. The porch was remodeled into a library after Mr. White's death. Glass doors divided the two areas.^{57.} The butler's pantry also had a door to the library. South of the informal dining area was the kitchen and beyond that a five-car garage. A stone walkway ran along the south side of the dining room, foyer, and living room.^{58.}

A pond on the south side of the house, dug originally to provide water in case of fire,^{59.} was home to a pair of swans^{60.} and several ducks at various times. The pond was used for boating in the summer and skating in the winter.^{61.}

Originally there was to be a sleeping porch at the west end of the house on the second floor as well as the east end of the house.^{62.} The Whites' bedroom, sitting room, and bath were to the right at the top of the stairs on the second floor. Other bedrooms were located on the same floor. The maids' rooms were also on the second floor at the back of the house. Mrs. White was an artist^{63.} and had a studio on the east side of the third floor in which to draw and paint.

Mr. White was a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers. In July 1929, shortly before Mr. White died, members of the Society were invited to the Circle W.^{64.} The delegation of members arrived in three Goodyear blimps and landed on the front lawn! The children got rides in the blimp while the adults were served mint juleps from Mrs. White's Georgian silver goblets. After the party was over, the Whites discovered that many of the goblets were missing and the children were recruited to search the grounds where they found most of them under bushes, etc. One goblet, however, was not recovered. Six months later it turned up underneath the pilot's seat in one of the blimps.^{65.}

Economically, Walter White made a very significant impact on Chester township. He hired many, many people from the surrounding area to work on the farm. He even gave a big boost to Chester's economy after his death. Chester Township received the inheritance tax from the White Estate in 1933, four years after he died. The \$171,070.95 helped pay off the school bond for Chester School, repaired and resurfaced roads and bridges,^{66.} and reduced the tax of Chester residents by \$5.50 per half year.^{67.}

After Mr. White's death, Mrs. White still entertained and hosted many charitable garden parties. The children living on the estate looked forward

to the clowns and pony rides at these events.^{68.}

When guests were invited to dinner, Mrs. White served cocktails before dinner, but never more than two were offered to a guest. Mrs. White chose the menu for dinner parties which usually consisted of soup, a fish course, entree, salad, dessert, and after dinner liqueurs.

The house always had fresh flower arrangements from the greenhouse, but at Christmastime Mrs. White's family shipped holly and evergreens from the south to help decorate the house.^{69.} When the two oldest girls had a dual coming out party, all the big trees in the garden were hung with Spanish moss shipped from South Carolina.^{70.}

After Mr. White died, the cattle and most of the horses were sold. The family retained only enough horses for their own use.

It took almost a year after Mrs. White's death in April 1959 to get the estate ready for sale.^{71.} Hawken School's eastern campus now occupies several acres of the White Estate.

FOOTNOTES - CIRCLE W FARM (WHITE ESTATE)

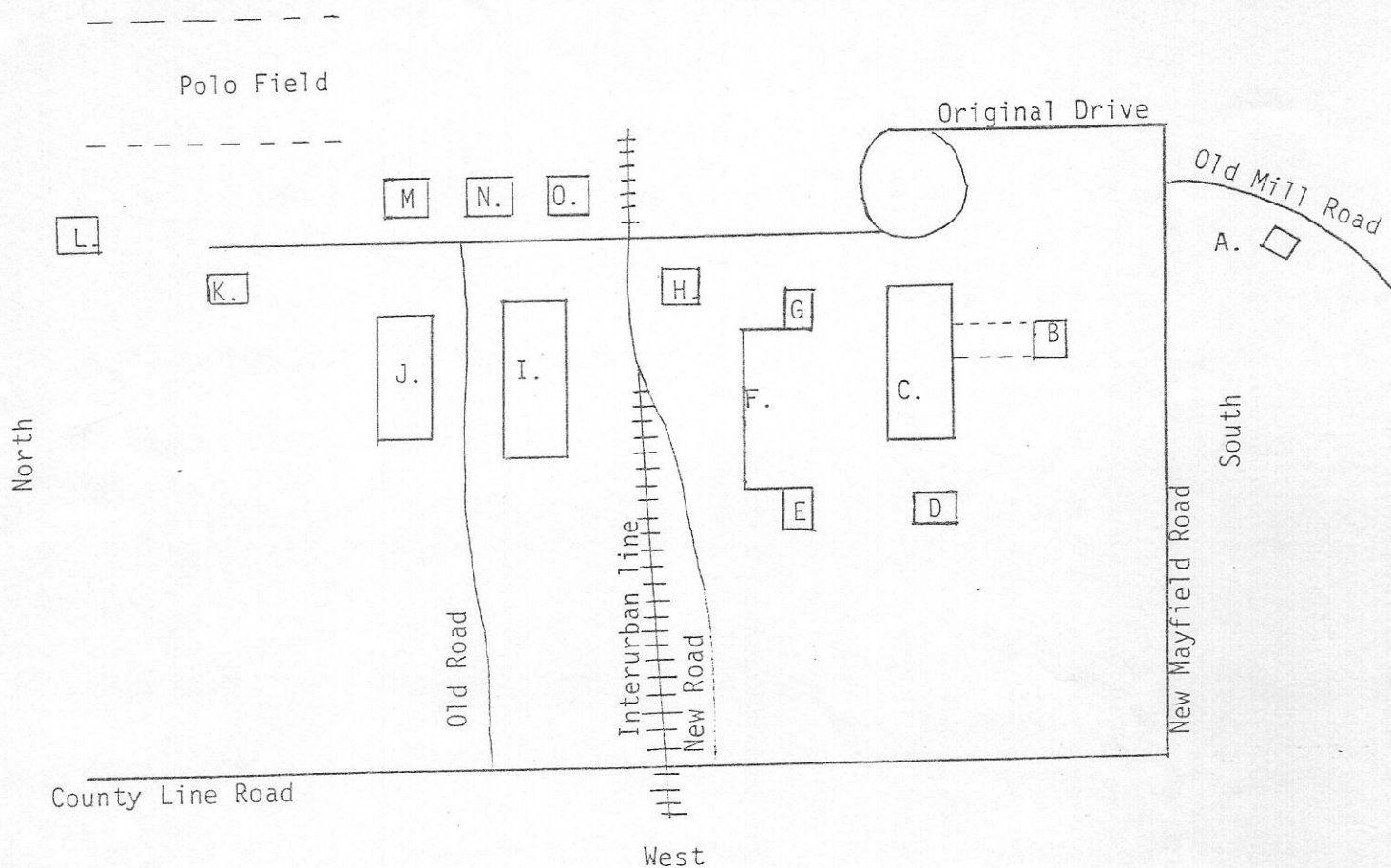
1. Geauga Times Leader, June 28, 1967
2. Clara McGowan
3. Mary White Anderson
4. Hawken Review, Winter/Spring 1986-87
5. Geauga County News, October 4, 1929
6. Review
7. Ibid.
8. George Brown of Gates Mills, Gates Mills Historical Society, 1969, pgs. 16, 27, 28
9. Geauga Republican Record, March 9, 1938
10. A Pictorial History of Gates Mills 1826-1976, The Gates Mills Historical Society, Gates Mills, Ohio, p. 60
11. Review
12. Anderson
13. Review
14. McGowan
15. Review
16. Anderson
17. Review
18. Geauga County News, october 3, 1923
19. News, June 11, 1924
20. History of Gates Mills, p. 146
21. Leader, June 28, 1967
22. McGowan
23. Anderson
24. Leader, March 9, 1973
25. Cleveland Press, July 18, 1980
26. Leader, March 9, 1973
27. Review
28. McGowan
29. Charles Dewey Boepple
30. Review
31. Boepple
32. Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 14, 1977
33. Leader, June 28, 1967
34. Boepple
35. Review
36. McGowan
37. Review
38. Author
39. McGowan
40. Review
41. McGowan
42. Review
43. McGowan
44. Anderson
45. McGowan
46. Barbara Davies
47. Anderson
48. Davies
49. The Sunday Paper, December 26, 1976
50. Chesterland News, May 21, 1986

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51. Ohio Historic Inventory done for the Ohio Historical Preservation Office
Found in the records at Geauga County Historical Society at Burton, Ohio
52. News, May 21, 1986
53. Boepple
54. McGowan
55. Anderson
56. News, May 21, 1986
57. Anderson
58. McGowan
59. Anderson
60. Davies
61. McGowan
62. Anderson
63. McGowan
64. Gauga County News, August 2, 1929
65. Review
66. Chester Township Trustee minutes of August 14, 1933 and August 17, 1933
67. Boepple
68. Davies
69. McGowan
70. Anderson
71. McGowan

CIRCLE W FARM

East



- A. Watchman's house
- B. Greenhouses and vegetable garden (Greenhouse behind the house attached to garage)
- C. The Main House
- D. Tennis court, log cabin for children
- E. Groom's cottage
- F. Stables
- G. Trophy Room
- H. Blacksmith shop with three carriage stalls, Carpenter shop, garages.
- I. Dairy Barn
- J. Boarding House for unmarried men
- K. Poultry house
- L. Old farmhouse
- M. Gardener's house
- N. Farm foreman's house
- O. Chauffeur's house

Mary White Anderson